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EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION REGARDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21 AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL: GUIDELINES TO THE SECRETARIAT FOR ORGANIZING INFORMATION PROVIDED TO GOVERNMENTS, INCLUDING INFORMATION IN THE FORM OF PERIODIC COMMUNICATIONS OR NATIONAL REPORTS AND NATIONAL AGENDA 21 ACTION PLANS REGARDING THE ACTIVITIES THEY UNDERTAKE TO IMPLEMENT AGENDA 21, THE PROBLEMS THEY FACE, SUCH AS THOSE RELATED TO FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER, AND OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES THEY FIND RELEVANT

Revised draft decision submitted by the Chairman on the basis of submissions received

1. In accordance with paragraph 3 (b) of General Assembly resolution 47/191, the Commission will consider information provided by Governments, including, for example, information in the form of periodic communications or national reports, regarding the activities they undertake to implement Agenda 21, the problems they face, such as problems related to financial resources and technology transfer, and other environment and development issues they find relevant.

2. In order to enable the Commission effectively to perform its function to review the progress in the implementation of the commitments contained in Agenda 21, including those related to the provision of financial resources and transfer of technology, Governments are encouraged to provide such information to the Secretariat.

3. Bearing in mind the voluntary nature of information to be provided by Governments and that it will be up to individual Governments to decide on its degree of detail and regularity, the Commission recommends that the information provided to the Secretariat in a given year should be relevant to the Agenda 21 clusters to be discussed that year in accordance with its multiyear programme of work, and that it should be concise and not exceed 50 pages. Furthermore, Governments may wish to provide an executive summary of the information of no more than five pages.

4. In order to allow the Secretary-General to ensure a more focused and coherent analysis of information and data received from Governments, the Commission agreed on the need for the Secretary-General to prepare reports using a standardized format, which Governments may wish to follow, taking into account the format of Agenda 21.

5. For that purpose, on the proposal of the Secretary-General, and in order to give the Secretariat sufficient time for the analysis of information received, Governments are encouraged to submit their information not less than six months prior to the Commission's sessions. Governments may wish to update such information at a later date. In order to facilitate the work of the Secretariat, Governments are encouraged to notify, as far as possible, the Secretary-General of a point of contact that has knowledge of the information provided.

6. The collection and dissemination of such information should be widely based, and as participatory as possible.

7. The Secretariat should follow, taking into account particular clusters of the multiyear programme of work of the Commission, the following general guidelines as regards the information to be included in the analytical reports envisaged in paragraph 8 below:

(a) Policies and measures adopted at the national level to meet the objectives of Agenda 21, including information on national sustainable development strategies or plans and on the major activities and projects undertaken;

(b) Institutional mechanisms to address sustainable development issues, including the participation of non-governmental sectors and major groups in those mechanisms;

(c) Assessments of progress achieved to date. These could be, where appropriate, in the form of statistical sheets or tables;

(d) Measures taken, including indicators, and progress achieved to reach sustainable production and consumption patterns and lifestyles, to combat poverty and to limit the demographic impact on the life-supporting capacity of the planet;

(e) The impact of the environmental measures undertaken on the national economy, which would also reflect information on the social impact of such measures;

(f) Experience gained - for example, descriptions of successful policies/projects that can serve as models; particularly progress in strategies that improve both social conditions and environmental sustainability;

(g) Specific problems and constraints encountered, including those related to finance and technology, as well as to the adverse impact of economic and trade policies and measures, in particular on developing countries;

(h) The adverse impact on sustainable development of trade restrictive and distortive policies and measures - specifically, trade policy measures for environmental purposes that constitute a means of arbitrary or unjustified discrimination or a disguised restriction on international trade - as well as progress in making trade and environment policies mutually supportive in favour of sustainable development, in accordance with principle 12 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development;

(i) Assessments of capacity - that is, the availability of domestic human, technological and financial resources;

(j) Assessments of needs and priorities for external assistance in terms of finance, technology transfer, cooperation and capacity-building and human resource development;

(k) Implementation of Agenda 21 commitments related to finance, including those related to the United Nations target of 0.7 per cent of gross national product for official development assistance and to the transfer of environmentally sound technology, cooperation and capacity-building;

(l) Assessments of the effectiveness of activities and projects of international organizations, including those of international financial institutions and funding mechanisms, and specific assistance that might be provided by them;

(m) Other relevant environment and development issues, including those affecting youth, women and other major groups.

8. Governments, in providing information to the Secretariat, are encouraged to take into account the above guidelines, in order, inter alia, to facilitate the task of the Secretariat.

9. In order to organize the information provided by Governments, the Secretary-General is requested to prepare, taking into account regional and subregional dimensions, the following analytical reports for future sessions of the Commission:

(a) An annual overview report on progress made in the implementation of Agenda 21, which should focus on the cross-sectoral components of Agenda 21 and the critical elements of sustainability and contain an analysis of progress made, the main trends, and the main problems countries face in the implementation of Agenda 21;

(b) Thematic reports, corresponding to the Agenda 21 sectoral clusters to be included on the agendas of forthcoming sessions of the Commission, in accordance with its multiyear programme of work. These reports should address the interrelationships between sectoral and cross-sectoral issues, reflecting the integrated nature of environment and development, including its social dimensions, and should include the following information:

(i) Progress achieved to date in the implementation of the objectives of relevant chapters of Agenda 21;

(ii) The main activities that countries are undertaking or planning in order to achieve those objectives;

(iii) The experience gained, particularly experience from which others may benefit;

(iv) Assessments of developments in capacity-building;

(v) Specific problems and constraints encountered by Governments at all levels, including local Agenda 21 activities and activities related to major groups;

(vi) Assessments of the availability of domestic human, technological and financial resources and of needs and priorities for external assistance;

(vii) Assessments of specific expectations from international organizations, financial institutions and funding mechanisms.

10. In order to facilitate an integrated analysis by the Commission of progress achieved at the national, subregional regional and international levels, the reports of the Secretary-General on the activities of intergovernmental organizations, both within and outside the United Nations system, to implement Agenda 21 requested in the draft decision contained in document E/CN.17/1993/L.2/Rev.1 should be structured in such a way as to permit, to the extent possible, comparison of the data and trends therein with those in the reports on national implementation referred to in paragraph 8 above.

11. Bearing in mind the evolving nature of Agenda 21 and the concept of sustainability in general, the Commission, in its analysis of the reports requested above, will focus on sharing local, national, subregional and regional experiences and on the elaboration of recommendations on mobilizing support for national efforts to implement Agenda 21. In the light of future progress in the elaboration of realistic, usable and easily understandable indicators that would provide a basis for a meaningful assessment of progress towards sustainable development, the Commission will consider the possibility of the integration of such indicators in the process outlined above.

12. The Commission requests relevant organizations within and outside the United Nations system, as well as bilateral donors, to provide technical and financial assistance to countries, particularly developing countries, in the preparation of periodic communications or national reports and national Agenda 21 action plans.